

TODAY

A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Luke

SESSION 5

Lord, I Am Not Worthy

Luke 7-8

A centurion's word, a widow's son, a weeping woman, and a question in a storm

Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that the words they say at every Mass before Communion are a Roman soldier's, that the raising at Nain is staged, down to a verbatim phrase, as Elijah at Zarephath, and that the storm on the lake ends in the question the whole Gospel is built to answer: who then is this?

Catholic Touchstone: The Domine, non sum dignus of the liturgy (CCC 1386 sets the centurion's words on our lips at Communion); the encounter of mercy and love in the sinful woman, with the faith-and-love question handled honestly; and Luke's unmatched attention to the women who followed and funded the mission.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The centurion of Capernaum (7:1–10) is a Gentile, an officer of the occupation, and the elders' character reference for him is remarkable: he loves our nation, and he built us our synagogue. But his theology is the marvel. He stops Jesus short of his door with the sentence the Church has made her own at every Mass: Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but say the word, and let my servant be healed. He reasons as a soldier: authority does not require presence, a word suffices. Jesus marvels, Luke says, the only time in this Gospel that Jesus marvels at something good, and declares that not even in Israel has he found such faith. The Nazareth pattern rings again: the outsider sees what the insiders miss. At every Mass, at the moment of maximum intimacy, the Church puts this Gentile soldier's words in our mouths (CCC 1386): the Lord under my roof, at his word.

Nain (7:11–17) is tonight's live discovery, and it must not be spoiled. A widow's only son is being carried out of the town gate; Jesus, moved with compassion, touches the bier, raises the young man, and, Luke writes, gave him to his mother. That phrase is a quotation. In 1 Kings 17, Elijah raises the son of the widow of Zarephath, and the Septuagint's sentence, he gave him to his mother, is the one Luke reproduces word for word. Nain sits just across the Hill of Moreh from Shunem, where Elisha raised another woman's son. The crowd's verdict, a great prophet has arisen among us, is exactly the conclusion Luke has staged, and it is exactly one size too small, which is the storm question's job to expose. Remember also whose son Jesus cited at Nazareth: the widow of Zarephath's. He has just done what he was nearly killed for mentioning.

The sinful woman (7:36–50) at Simon the Pharisee's table is Luke at full power: a woman of the city, uninvited, weeping over Jesus' feet, wiping them with her hair, while the host silently concludes that a real prophet would know better than to be touched by her. Jesus, hearing the silent thought, tells the parable of the two debtors and turns the room inside out: her extravagance is not scandal but receipt, the overflow of a forgiveness already received. Tonight's steelman lives in the two verses that follow. Verse 47 grounds forgiveness in love, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; verse 50 grounds salvation in faith, your faith has saved you. A Protestant reading takes 7:50 as sola fide in miniature and treats 7:47 as evidence rather than cause. Prepare to present that at full strength, and to answer with the Catholic both-and: faith is the root and love the life of the same grace, fides caritate

formata, faith working through love (Gal 5:6), and the parable itself refuses the separation, for the debtor's love is the proof that the cancellation was real. Where the exegesis of 7:47's *hoti* clause is genuinely disputed, say so; the Church does not need the grammar to fall one way to hold that the faith that saves is never alone.

Luke 8 opens with a paragraph no other evangelist wrote: the Twelve, and also some women, Mary called Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means. The mission of Jesus ran on the generosity and courage of named women, one of them from inside Herod's own household, and Luke, who will make women the first witnesses of the resurrection, says so plainly. The parable of the sower follows with its own key (the seed is the word of God), and the section closes with the two panels that set up next week: the storm, where the disciples' question, who then is this, that he commands even wind and water, hangs unanswered in the air, and the raising of Jairus's daughter with the healing of the hemorrhaging woman folded inside it, faith reaching through a crowd to touch the tassel of his garment. Hold the storm question with both hands at session's end; Peter answers it in Session 6.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

1 Kgs 17:8–24 Elijah raises the widow's son; he gave him to his mother — **Lk 7:11–17**

2 Kgs 4:32–37 Elisha at Shunem, a few miles from Nain on the same hill — **Lk 7:11**

Mal 3:1 with Ex 23:20 **I send my messenger to prepare the way; Luke quotes them as a composite, before thy face** — **Lk 7:27**

Ps 107:23–32 He made the storm be still; the sailors' fear and wonder — **Lk 8:22–25**

Num 15:38–39 The tassel on the garment's edge that the woman grasps — **Lk 8:44**

Isa 61:1 with 35:5–6 The blind see, the lame walk, the poor hear good news: the answer sent to John — **Lk 7:22**

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Augustine of Hippo (*Sermon 98, on the widow of Nain*)

Augustine reads the three raisings in the Gospels as three depths of the soul's death: the girl still in the house is sin within the heart, the young man at the gate is sin gone out into deed, and Lazarus in the tomb is sin grown into habit. Yet the Lord raised all three, so no one, Augustine insists, should despair: the same voice that stopped the bier at Nain can stop any procession, however far it has gotten from the house.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory the Great (*Forty Gospel Homilies, Homily 33*)

Preaching on the woman at Simon's table, Gregory turns her into the pattern of true penance: for every instrument of vanity she found a corresponding offering, eyes that had allured now weep, hair that had adorned now wipes, lips that had spoken lightly now kiss the feet of Mercy itself.

Whatever in us has served sin, Gregory concludes, must be enlisted in love's service, so that penance is not the destruction of the self but its conversion.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyril of Alexandria (*Commentary on Luke, on the centurion*)

Cyril marvels with the Lord at the soldier's reasoning: accustomed to command, the centurion grasped that Christ's authority over sickness needed no journey and no touch, only a word, and in confessing himself unworthy of the visit he proved worthier than those who presumed upon it. Faith, Cyril observes, measured the Lord more truly from a distance than familiarity managed at close range.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 1386 The centurion's words placed on our lips before Communion: Lord, I am not worthy.

CCC 2712 Contemplative prayer as the prayer of the forgiven sinner who loves much.

CCC 1987–1995 Justification: conversion, faith, and charity conferred together; the background to the faith-and-love question.

CCC 2616 Prayer to Jesus answered during his ministry: the leper, Jairus, the sinful woman, faith reaching for him.

THREAD WATCH

Who then is this? (PLANTS TONIGHT, resolves Session 6): The storm question at 8:25 is the cliffhanger. End the session with it deliberately unanswered; Peter answers it next week at 9:20, and the Father answers over Peter's head at 9:35.

Blessed outsiders (develops tonight): A Gentile centurion out-believes Israel. Add him to the tally aloud.

Meals with sinners (develops tonight): Second great table scene: a Pharisee's house this time, and the scandal reversed, the host fails the hospitality the sinner supplies.

Overshadow (SEALED, RESOLVES NEXT SESSION): Remind the group at close: bring your Take-Home 1 next week with the My Guess box intact. Say nothing else.

SESSION GOALS

1. Connect the centurion's sentence to the words of every Mass, and his outsider's faith to the Nazareth pattern.
2. Run the Nain discovery live: the group finds 1 Kings 17 and catches Luke's verbatim phrase, then names why a great prophet is true but too small.
3. Work the sinful woman with the steelman at full strength: faith and love in justification, honestly and without caricature.

4. Give Luke 8:1–3 its due: the named women who financed and followed the mission.
5. Leave the storm question ringing and set the table for Session 6, including the sealed-guess reminder.

Time Note (75–90 minutes)

If time runs short, summarize John's question and Jesus' answer (7:18–35) in one sentence on the way to Q3, and compress Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman into the leader's framing of Q6. Never cut Q2 (the Nain discovery), Q4 (the steelman), or the closing minute that leaves the storm question unanswered and reminds them to bring Take-Home 1 next week.

Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord Jesus, a soldier once told you that a word from you would be enough, and the Church has never found a better prayer. Say the word over us tonight: heal what is sick, raise what has died in us, forgive what weighs on us, and still whatever storm we carried through the door. We are not worthy that you should enter under our roof, and you enter anyway. Amen.*

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS (10 MIN)

W1. Whose word do you trust so completely that you would act on it without checking, and how did they earn that?

W2. Describe a time you were shown mercy you absolutely could not repay. What did you do with it?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT (50–60 MIN)

HOW TO LEAD THIS SECTION

Tonight has two summits, the Nain discovery and the sinful woman's steelman, with the Mass connection at the start and a cliffhanger at the end. Keep John the Baptist's interlude brief and protect twenty minutes for Question 4.

1. Read Luke 7:1–10. What do the Jewish elders say about this centurion, what does he say about himself, and what is the logic of his but say the word? Where have you heard his sentence before?

Leader: *Let someone recognize the Communion echo on their own if possible. Then draw out the soldier's reasoning about authority.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The elders vouch for him, he loves our nation and built our synagogue, but the centurion vouches against himself: I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, and I did not presume to come to you. His logic is a soldier's: I say to one, go, and he goes; authority does not need proximity, a word is enough. Jesus marvels, the only time in Luke he marvels at faith, and crowns an occupying Gentile officer above all Israel. And the Church heard something permanent in his sentence: at every Mass, as the Lord prepares to come under the roof of our bodies, we pray this man's prayer almost word for word (CCC 1386). The outsider of Capernaum wrote the Communion line of the world.

2. Live discovery: Read Luke 7:11–17 slowly, then hunt: this scene is staged as a rerun of a specific Old Testament raising. Find 1 Kings 17:8–24. What matches, and which phrase does Luke quote word for word? Then weigh the crowd's verdict in 7:16: a great prophet has arisen among us. True, false, or too small?

Leader: The matches: a widow, her son, dead (Luke adds that he is her only son); the man of God meets her; the son is raised; and the verbatim phrase, he gave him to his mother (1 Kgs 17:23). If they stall, ask which widow Jesus mentioned at Nazareth.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Luke has restaged Zarephath outside Nain: a widow's son, the man of God at the town gate, the raising, and the exact sentence of the Septuagint, he gave him to his mother. Nain sits just across the Hill of Moreh from Shunem, where Elisha raised another son. So the crowd's verdict, a great prophet has arisen, is the conclusion Luke built them to reach, and it is true and too small at once. Elijah stretched himself on the boy and cried out to the Lord to act; Jesus touches the bier and issues an order in his own name: young man, I say to you, arise. The prophet petitions; this one commands. The gap between those verbs is the gap the storm question will tear open at the end of tonight. And notice the engine of the miracle: no one asked. He had compassion on her. Mercy moved first.

3. Read Luke 7:18–23. John, in prison, sends to ask: are you he who is to come? Jesus answers with a list. Where does the list come from, and why answer a yes-or-no question with a resume?

Leader: Quick question; Isaiah 35 and 61. The answer is yes, in the key of prophecy.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The list chiefly evokes Isaiah, read aloud: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the poor have good news preached to them (Isa 35:5–6; 61:1). The cleansing of lepers and the raising of the dead, the very things Luke has just narrated, reach beyond Isaiah to the works of Elijah and Elisha, the prophets Jesus invoked at Nazareth. Jesus answers the Baptist in the only currency a prophet fully trusts: Scripture being fulfilled before his messengers' eyes. And the gentle coda, blessed is he who takes no offense at me, concedes what Nazareth proved: fulfillment does not look the way the audience ordered. Even the greatest man born of woman must let the Messiah define himself.

4. Steelman chain: Read Luke 7:36–50 with care. Verse 47 says her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; verse 50 says your faith has saved you. The strongest Protestant reading holds that verse 50 states the cause (faith alone) and verse 47 states the evidence (love as proof, not ground). Give that reading its full strength, including how the parable of the two debtors supports it: the love follows the cancellation. Then press: can this passage separate faith from love at all, and what does the Church actually claim about how they relate?

Leader: Do not rush to the answer. The Protestant reading of the parable's logic is genuinely strong; honor it, then hold the both-and.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The steelman earns its keep: in the parable, the debtor loves because he was forgiven, so love is the receipt, not the payment, and 7:50 says plainly that faith saved her. A Catholic should concede all of that without flinching, and the Council of Trent does: nothing before justification, neither faith nor works, merits the grace of it. But watch what the passage refuses to do: it never lets faith and love

come apart. Her faith arrives weeping, kissing, anointing; the faith that saves her is the faith already working through love (Gal 5:6), *fides caritate formata*, faith alive with charity, against a Pharisee whose orthodoxy sat at table and offered Mercy neither water, nor kiss, nor oil. Where the grammar of 7:47 is genuinely disputed, whether the *hoti* gives the ground or the evidence of forgiveness, say so honestly; the Church's teaching does not hang on that clause. It hangs on the whole scene: the faith that saves is never alone, and love is what saved faith looks like in a body (CCC 1991).

DIG DEEPER: THE WOMEN OF LUKE 8:1-3

Only Luke records the mission's funding: Mary Magdalene, freed of seven demons; Joanna, wife of Herod's own steward; Susanna; and many others, who provided for them out of their means. The verb is the one the Church uses for deacons' service. A movement whose patrons included a woman from Herod's own household is exactly the kind of detail Luke's investigation (1:3) would preserve, and Mary Magdalene and Joanna, named here as providers, reappear by name at the empty tomb (24:10). Among the first witnesses of the resurrection were women who had been funding the mission all along.

5. Read Luke 8:4–15, the sower. Jesus gives the key himself: the seed is the word of God. Walk the four soils. Which failure mode does he describe as the danger for people like us, and what does the good soil actually do (v. 15)?

Leader: Brief but personal. Verse 14's thorns are the young adult's soil: cares, riches, pleasures, fruit that never ripens.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The path never receives, the rock receives without root and folds at testing, and the thorns, Luke's most contemporary soil, receive and grow while the cares and riches and pleasures of life choke the fruit before it ripens. The good soil is described with Luke's favorite verbs: those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience. Hold fast is what Mary has been doing since 2:19. The sower is not running a seed shortage; the variable in the parable is never the seed. It is the ground we let ourselves become.

6. Read Luke 8:22–25. Asleep in the stern, wakened by terrified fishermen, he rebukes wind and raging water, and asks them: where is your faith? Then read Psalm 107:23–32. Who stills storms in Israel's Scriptures? Sit with the disciples' question in verse 25 and do not answer it: who then is this?

Leader: End here deliberately. Read the question twice and close the discussion with it hanging. Do not let anyone answer it tonight; tell them the answer has an appointment next week.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Psalm 107 is unambiguous: it is the Lord who made the storm be still, so that the waves of the sea were hushed, while sailors cried to him in their trouble. That psalm was Israel's own grammar for storms at sea. So when a word from the stern flattens the lake, their fear changes object, from the storm to the one who stopped it, and their question is the Gospel's engine: who then is this, that he

commands even wind and water, and they obey him? Say nothing more tonight. Peter answers it next week, and then a voice out of a cloud answers it over Peter's head. Bring your Take-Home 1 with the sealed My Guess box; next session, we open them.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT (10 MIN)

S1. The centurion believed a word at a distance was enough. Where are you demanding that God show up in person, on your terms, before you will trust him with something?

S2. The woman at Simon's table let her gratitude be seen, at real social cost. What would it look like this week for your gratitude to God to become visible enough to be misunderstood?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- At Mass this week, when you say Lord, I am not worthy, say it as the centurion: slowly, and meaning the second half, but only say the word.
- Read Psalm 107 once, out loud, and mark verses 28–30.
- Before next session, read Luke 9:1–62, and bring Take-Home 1 with your sealed guess. Do not peek at it, and do not look anything up.

Scripture memory: **Luke 7:50**, *Your faith has saved you; go in peace.* (RSV2CE)

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord Jesus, you stopped a funeral with compassion, defended a weeping woman with a parable, and hushed a storm with a word. We leave tonight carrying the boat's question: who then is this? Answer it in us, Lord, not only next week but every day, until our faith learns to sleep through storms because of who is in the boat. Amen.*

Leader Reference Card: Session 5

Every passage used tonight, in order of appearance. 1 Kings 17 is the load-bearing bookmark; Psalm 107 closes the night.

Passage Used for

Luke 7:1–10 Q1: the centurion; CCC 1386

Luke 7:11–17 Q2: Nain

1 Kings 17:8–24 Q2 live discovery: Zarephath; he gave him to his mother

2 Kings 4:32–37 Q2 background: Elisha at Shunem

Luke 7:18–23 Q3: John's question

Isaiah 35:5–6; 61:1 Q3: the answer's source

Luke 7:36–50 Q4 steelman: the sinful woman

Galatians 5:6 Q4: faith working through love

Luke 8:1–3 Dig Deeper: the women who provided

Luke 8:4–15 Q5: the sower

Luke 8:22–25 Q6: the storm; the question left open

Psalm 107:23–32 Q6: who stills the sea

CCC 1386, 2712, 1987–1995, 2616 Catechism Connection

Next week: Luke 9, the hinge of the Gospel: Peter's confession, the Transfiguration, and the opening of the sealed guesses. Bring your own Take-Home 1 too, and have Exodus 40:34–35 flagged where no one can see it.